

October 24, 2007



Mr. Phil Isenberg, Chair, and Members
Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force
650 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Draft Vision

Dear Chair Isenberg and Members of the Task Force:

The Contra Costa Council has reviewed the latest draft vision and commends the staff and Task Force for a document that, in our view, includes the majority of the components necessary that could lead to a successful solution of the crisis in the Delta.

From a stylistic perspective, however, we suggest that the key elements of the vision be incorporated in a one or two page statement at the beginning of the document. The background, discussion and technical data could then be appended to the vision itself. We believe this approach will define the vision in a more straightforward and clear manner and make the document much more readable.

With respect to the draft vision, we are pleased that the document recognizes the co-equal importance of a reliable water supply and the Delta ecosystem. Both are critical to the state's economy and our environmental stewardship of the largest estuary on the west coast of the Americas.

We also offer the following comments as the vision relates to our key principles:

Public health and safety

We commend the recommendations in Appendix 2 which address public safety and disaster preparedness, including planning, agency coordination and public education. The appendix correctly identifies the good work begun by the Delta Protection Commission and Delta counties, which we believe should be a model for state planning. A minor point is to include a coordinated warning system in the Delta in the event of a levee failure on one or more islands

Provide a reliable supply of high quality water for California

The document correctly notes that improved Delta conveyance is essential to reliability, but must also protect the ecosystem. Staged actions in the Delta, followed by evaluation based on adopted standards, as described on page 9 is an appropriate strategy.

In particular, we want to stress the importance of storage, both surface and groundwater, to a successful solution for water reliability and ecosystem protection. As the language on page 10 suggests, storage and conveyance must be coupled in order to operate the system with flexibility to protect both the environment and economy. Upstream storage is needed to regulate the amount of flow through the Delta. And assuming that climate change will negatively affect the Sierra snow pack, it becomes even more imperative that we use surface storage to capture surplus runoff to provide for the water needs of the state and the ecosystem.

Protect infrastructure in the Delta

We believe that the document should include stronger language about protecting the infrastructure in the Delta, which includes roads and highways, railroads, utility distribution lines, aqueducts, pipelines and shipping channels. Solutions for water conveyance and ecosystem protection should include interagency coordination with CalTrans, DWR, Energy Commission, etc. to ensure protection and improvements to infrastructure.

Protect environmental health of the estuary

The vision correctly identifies the Delta as a national treasure and a unique place. We support the concepts for restoration of habitat and estuarine ecosystem functions.

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Linda Best



Develop a regulatory framework that will protect ecosystem health, water quality and reliability

The vision document indicates that further work on governance will occur as the vision evolves. We believe that there must be an independent governmental body with legal authority and accountability to regulate and assure applicable water quality and environmental standards are met in the Delta. To that end, we believe that such a body:

- Should have oversight responsibility, authority and accountability for the Delta region
- Should include “high level” federal, state and local representatives, independent of any facility construction and operation activity, that will protect the overall values of the “public trust” of the Delta
- Must establish objective criteria for protecting the Delta, including seasonally based water quality and “outflow to the Bay” flow rate standards, measured at key locations
- Must obtain expertise from existing federal, state and local government agencies/ Take the best information and apply it.
- Must review and approve any plans that will affect the Delta and in effect become the legal authority to weigh all competing interests for the protection of the Delta
- Must issue regulatory approvals (permits) for any construction and operations based on legal proceedings, findings and objective criteria. These permits should be simultaneous, not serial, to ensure timely implementation. The ability to act expeditiously is critical.
- Must have enforcement powers against any operations that do not conform to the permits.

There is one additional item that we think needs the Task Force’s attention. While we work to create a long-term vision, it is imperative that the state takes immediate action to fund short-term actions to protect strategic levees that ensure our water supply as well as protect the ecosystem. Funds have been authorized by the voters for this purpose, but there has been minimal allocation to these priorities. Emergency preparedness is a good example. We have been discussing for close to a year about funding from Propositions 84 and 1E for short-term actions that will protect the water supply and the ecosystem and yet no funds of significance have been allocated. We urge the Task Force to advocate for allocation of these funds for this purpose.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Linda Best
President and CEO